I had the opportunity to meet Marianne Fons in 2013. One of the things she said was that she “Quilted (longarmed) by check.” I had only been quilting a year at the time and all I could think of was “I’m not worthy.” I am probably still not worthy, but I’d enjoy immensely longarming a quilt for Marianne Fons just to say I did. No check required. The hardest part would be the consultation, Iowa and Pennsylvania are not exactly neighbors. Not only the hardest part, but one of the most important parts to longarming someone’s completed project. I am thankful that I spent this time with many of the piecers I’ve worked with over the years in VA and can still satisfy their needs knowing we found the ‘common ground’ many times before.

I place a tremendous amount of value in the consultation between the longarmer and the piecer.

For numerous reasons.

* I have absolutely no idea what you envisioned when you set out to make a quilt. The piecer may know exactly what pattern he/she wants. Or totally open to another’s ideas.
* Having longarmed over 1300 quilts I can guarantee what I see and what the piecer sees can, has, could and most likely will be at different ends…we need to find that common ground. That cannot happen without consultation. As strange as it sounds, I don’t sew. I’m certainly not a piecer so looking at your project is with some really different eyes. More often than not…this may be one of those, “Four eyes are better than two.”
* Common ground.
  + Pattern, what was envisioned or chosen. Can I even do it? I am a hand guided longarmer with a pantograph system. Not being computer driven makes doing some patterns, digitized for computer systems, outside the quality I demand of myself.
  + Pattern size. Some piecers want a tight pattern, maybe they had a ‘stipple’ in mind. Others want an open pattern that doesn’t ‘stiffen’ the feel of the quilt. Maybe both.
  + Thread Color. I want it to blend. At the same time the quilt might call for a color that highlights the pattern. Often in baby quilts. The piecer may have the exact opposite in mind. What I ***don’t*** want is for the thread color, or the quilting pattern for that matter, to be the first thing a person sees when they look at the quilt. I’m good if they don’t see either in most cases. They should be admiring the quilt. I know I do…there is a tad of jealousy. Like I said, I don’t sew. Occasionally, like a music themed T Quilt, a musical staff and notes pattern, which will most certainly be spotted, may be appropriate. When it comes to your quilt…like Joan Rivers used to say, “Can we talk.”
* The consultation is the first time I’ve seen the quilt, the piecer, in some cases has been looking at it for weeks, even months. I’ve longarmed quilts that have been in progress, UFO’s, for 20 years. How important is it that I be very attentive to a piecer that kept this project around? When the time came, frequently a mood shift or “OMG, I didn’t know this was there!” With a refreshed vision another completed quilt.

The last bit of consultation comes when the piecer picks up the quilt. When and only when, I’ve had to deal with a problem and know of a reliable solution that has been learned through experience or from those more experienced, longarmers and piecers, I will relay that information to a piecer. I would expect the same if a longarmer or piecer saw something in my efforts that needed to be commented on. If it weren’t for these exchanges, I would still be having tension problems.

Quilt till you wilt…we do.

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